

MISCELLANEOUS.

ARTHUR MACHEN AND "THE ANGELS OF MONS."

BY VINCENT STARRETT.

There can be little doubt that Arthur Machen started the "legend." In a nutshell, the facts are these: Arthur Machen is a special writer employed by the London *Evening News*, in whose columns shortly after the retreat from Mons appeared a sketch from his pen, called "The Bowmen." It told of the miraculous appearance of the English archers of Agincourt at a time when the British were hard pressed by the Germans, and whose "singing arrows fled so swift and thick that they darkened the air."

The story was seized upon at once by church and laity; rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, as an actual narrative and immediately other stories began to be heard, of other miraculous appearances, superinduced unquestionably by Machen's story, for until after the publication of that story there was no "legend" whatsoever. The spiritualists and other occultists took it up, and pamphlets and articles were written briskly.

Somebody—I think Ralph Shirley—had the inspiration finally to write to Machen asking for his data. Machen replied simply with the truth—that the tale was purely fictional; he had "made it up out of his head," but by reason of his supreme art [this expression is mine] he lent to it such a startling verisimilitude that it appeared to be an actual chronicle. Shirley could not believe it—would not; nor would the others. The story was reprinted a dozen times, perhaps, and the whole affair became a sort of hysteria for a time.

The "angels" idea probably grew out of Machen's line in the tale about "a long line of shapes, with a shining about them." Also Machen had mentioned St. George in the story—so there were now tales from soldiers who had seen St. George. And so on. The outstanding fact is, however, that none of the legends existed until *after* publication of Machen's story. Machen sticks to this absolutely, and he is thoroughly trustworthy and patriotic.

You will find a complete exposition of the "legend" in the book of war "legends" published by Machen in 1915, and to be had in this country from Putnam. In a prologue and an epilogue Machen sums up the case as it appears to him, and finds matter for considerable cynical amusement.

He does not deny the possibility of miraculous intervention, nor do I, (I know nothing about these things!) but in this instance it seems certain there was no such phenomenon.

Machen is my friend and is one of the great masters of English literature. Machen is Welsh; not German—as his name might mislead one to believe! He has been gloriously ignored for thirty years. But he ranks—and I hope this letter will turn up some day a hundred years from now, when it will have become apparent to all—with Cervantes and Rabelais and Boccaccio! Read his great novel *The Hill of Dreams*; and his remarkable short stories in *The House of Souls*; and his long-out-of-print Rabelaisian masterpiece, *The Chronicle of Clemendy*—if you can get them. They are worth buying at any price.